

QUESTIONS.

1. Of what were the people of Juda guilty during the reign of the same Ozias? Whom did God, therefore, send them? Of what did Isaias warn the people? 2. What did the Lord also reveal to this prophet? What would one suppose reading his prophecies? 3 and 4. What did Isaias foretell concerning the mother of the Savior? What did Isaias prophesy concerning the birth of the Redeemer? What, concerning His passion? What, regarding His future glory? How long did Isaias prophesy? What is said about the death of this great prophet?

CHAPTER LXXIII.

The Pious King Ezechias. (723-694 B. C.)

He that is good, shall draw grace from the Lord.—*Prov. 12, 2.*

DURING the reign of Achaz the people of Juda were visited with a terrible calamity. That unhappy king had sacrificed his own children to the idol Moloch,¹ one of the chief gods of the Gentiles. He had broken the sacred vessels, and closed the gates of the temple. The Lord, therefore, delivered him into the hands of the king of Syria, who slew in one day a hundred and twenty thousand men of Juda, while two hundred thousand women and children were carried into captivity.

2. Achaz having died a short time after, his son Ezechias ascended the throne. This pious prince immediately cast down the altars which his unhappy father had everywhere raised to the pagan gods; he threw open again the gates of the temple, and exhorted the Levites to purify it from the profanations that had taken place there; saying that it was because of the sins of the people, and, above all, because of their idolatry, that so many misfortunes had come upon them.

3. And God blessed Ezechias, and was with him in all he

¹ MOLOCH (pr. Mo'-lok).

did; so that, in his days, the kingdom of Juda regained all its former prosperity. Nevertheless, it came to pass that, after some years, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came with a mighty army and besieged Jerusalem.

4. Then Ezechias went to the temple and prayed. He also sent priests clothed in sackcloth, to the prophet Isaias, to ask him to intercede with God in behalf of him and his people. The prophet sent word to Ezechias not to fear, for that God had heard his prayer, and would destroy the Assyrians, and that their king, returning to his own country, should perish by the sword.

5. That same night the angel of the Lord went to the camp of the Assyrians and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors. Thus Sennacherib was obliged to return with disgrace to his own country. There he went to the temple of his god, and his own sons slew him with the sword. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias. Ezechias some time after, fell sick and lay at the point of death. The prophet Isaias was sent to tell him to put his house in order, for that he must die.

6. The king, terrified at the thought of death, turned his face towards the temple, and prayed with tears that God might prolong his life. God heard his prayer, and set the prophet again to tell him that fifteen years should be added to his life. And so it came to pass; and at the end of the fifteen years he died, after a happy and a prosperous reign, the reward of his fidelity to God.

QUESTIONS.

1. With what were the people of Juda visited during the reign of Achaz? What had the unhappy king done? Into whose hands did the Lord deliver him? How many of the men of Juda were slain in one day? How many women and children were carried into captivity? 2. Who ascended the throne when Achaz died? What did this pious prince immediately do? Saying what? 3. How did God reward Ezechias? Who came soon after with a mighty army to besiege Jerusalem? 4. What did Ezechias then do? What did he also do? What word did Isaias send to the king? 5. What

happened that same night? What was Sennacherib obliged to do? What happened to him on his return home? Who was taken sick some time after? What was Isaias sent to tell him? 6. What did the king do, terrified at the thought of death? What was the prophet sent again to tell him? What sort of reign had Ezechias? In reward of what?

CHAPTER LXXIV.

Judith.

The Lord is my strength and my praise.—*Exod.* 15, 2.

AFTER a brief season of repentance and of penance, the people of Juda again forgot the Lord. Then God, in His anger, sent them a new and terrible punishment, which would have ended in the total destruction of their nation, were it not for the heroic courage of a certain holy woman. At that time Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian forces, came at the head of a mighty army to overthrow the kingdom of Juda, as he had overthrown many other kingdoms.

2. Having taken all the cities and strongholds of the country, and treated their inhabitants with savage cruelty, he came to lay siege to Bethulia. He cut off the aqueducts which supplied the city with water, and thereby reduced the citizens to such an extremity that the elders resolved to give up the city in five days unless they were relieved before that time. Meanwhile, they prayed fervently to God, humbled themselves before Him, and strewed ashes on their heads.

3. Now there was in the city a woman named Judith, of rare beauty and of great wealth, who, being a widow, lived retired in her own house, and spent her days in prayer and good works. Being touched with compassion for the sad condition of her people, she presented herself before the ancients of the city and said: "What is this word by which you have consented to give up the city within five days? You have

set a time for the mercy of the Lord according to your pleasure. This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather indignation. Let us therefore be penitent for this same thing, and remember that all the saints were tempted and remained faithful; but that those who rejected the trials of the Lord were destroyed. And let us believe that these scourges have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction."

4. The ancients, inspired by these noble words, begged her to pray for the people. She consented, and retiring to her oratory, clothed herself in haircloth, put ashes on her head, and falling prostrate before the Lord, she besought Him to humble the enemies of her nation. While she thus prayed, Almighty God inspired her with the thought that she should go into the camp of the enemy and cut off the head of the Assyrian general Holofernes.

5. Then putting off the hair-cloth, she immediately arrayed herself in the richest garments, perfumed herself with the best ointments, plaited her hair, and adorned herself with bracelets, earlets and rings. And the Lord increased her beauty, because all her dressing up did not proceed from vanity. Then she took a servant maid with her and set out for the camp of Holofernes.

6. Being brought before Holofernes, the tyrant was charmed by her majestic beauty, and, supposing that she had fled from her own people, ordered her to receive every attention, and to be allowed to go and come as she pleased. On the fourth day Holofernes gave a grand banquet to the officers of his army. He and they overcharged themselves with wine, and when they lay down on their couches they fell into a death-like sleep. Then Judith resolved to strike the decisive blow that was to save her country and her people.

7. She besought God, saying: "Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look upon the works of my hands, that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by Thee." Then she

moved softly towards the tent of Holofernes. And taking his sword, which hung from a pillar near by, she drew it from its scabbard, raised it aloft, and at the second stroke cut off the head of the sleeping tyrant. She then gave the head to her maid, who waited without, and bade her put it into her wallet.

8. Departing from the camp, she returned with her servant to Bethulia, and having assembled the people, showed them the head of Holofernes, saying: "Praise ye the Lord our God, who hath killed the enemy of His people by my hand. His angel hath been my keeper and hath brought me back to you." Then Ozias, the prince of the people of Israel, said to her: "Blessed art thou, O daughter of the Lord, the most high God, above all women upon the earth." Then the people, praising God, rushed towards the camp of the Assyrians. The guards, terrified and confused, made a great noise at the door of their general's tent in order to awaken him.

9. But finding their efforts useless, they at length ventured to enter the tent, and seeing the headless body of their mighty general weltering in blood, they were seized with fear, and fled in haste, crying out that Holofernes was slain. A great confusion ensued, and the people of Bethulia had only to complete the work commenced by Judith, and take possession of the Assyrian camp with all its rich spoils.

10. Then the Jewish people, turning to Judith, sang with one accord: "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem; thou art the joy of Israel; thou art the honor of our people." The rejoicings following on this splendid victory were kept up for three months. And Judith became great throughout all Israel. She died at an advanced age, and was mourned by all the people.

11. Judith is, in some degree, a figure of Mary the Immaculate Virgin. Mary is the true heroine of Israel, and of mankind. Judith was praised by the people of one city as

the pride and ornament of Jerusalem. Mary is praised throughout the whole earth as the glory of her people, the co-operatrix in the redemption of the whole human race, the woman whose seed conquered death and hell, as the Almighty Himself foretold to Adam and Eve after their fall.

QUESTIONS.

1. Did the people of Juda again forget God? What did God send them in His anger? Who saved them from destruction? Who came at the head of a mighty army to overthrow the kingdom of Juda? 2. To what city did he lay siege, after taking all the other cities? What had the citizens at length resolved to do if relief did not come? Meanwhile, what did they do? 3. What particular person was in the city? Before whom did she present herself? What did she tell the ancients? 4. What did the ancients beg Judith to do? Having consented, what did she do? While she thus prayed, with what did God inspire her? 5. What did she then do? For what place did she set out? 6. What happened when she was brought before Holofernes? What did Holofernes do on the fourth day? What followed? What did Judith then resolve to do? How did she pray? 7. What did she do? 8. What did Judith do on returning to Bethulia? What did she call upon the people to do? What did the people do, praising God? What did the Assyrian guards do? 9. What did they do when, going into the tent, they saw the dead body of their general? What had the people of Bethulia only to do? 10. What did the Jewish people, turning to Judith, sing with one accord? 11. Of whom is Judith, in some degree, a figure? Who is the true heroine of Israel and mankind?

CHAPTER LXXV.

The Babylonian Captivity.—Fall of the Kingdom of Juda.
(588 B. C.)

The wicked shall be destroyed from the earth.—*Prov. 2, 22.*

AT last the people of Juda became so hardened in sin that the divine chastisements had no longer any effect upon their hearts. They gave themselves wholly up to the

vile practices of idolatry, and persecuted the prophets of God, several of whom they put to death. In vain did the great prophet Jeremias, who lived at that time, endeavor to recall them to repentance. Finally the patience of the merciful God was exhausted, and the ruin so often foretold by the prophet Isaias fell heavily on the people.

2. In the year 606 before Christ, Nabuchodonosor, king of Babylon, placed himself at the head of an immense army,



JEREMIAS LAMENTING THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

marched against Jerusalem, and, having taken it, carried away the king and the principal inhabitants as captives. Sixteen years later, those who were left in Jerusalem, revolted against Nabuchodonosor, and the latter returned with a still greater army, and, after a siege of eighteen months, he took Jerusalem by storm.

3. Then the whole city was given up to fire and pillage.

The temple itself was consumed by fire, and the sacred vessels were carried off. All the people that escaped the sword were led into captivity in Babylon, and the splendid city of Jerusalem was reduced to a heap of ruins.

4. Jeremias remained in Jerusalem, and sitting on the ruins of the desolate city he lamented in the most pathetic manner the miseries of his people and the destruction of Jerusalem. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people; how is the mistress of nations become as a widow; the princess of provinces made tributary? The ways of Sion mourn because there are none that come to the solemn feast. O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow. To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee? Great as the sea is thy destruction. Who shall heal thee? Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted; renew our days, as from the beginning."

5. Jeremias, however, was not without consolation. He knew that Israel would be restored and that God would make a new covenant with His people. "The days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Juda. Not according to the covenants which I made with their fathers, which they made void. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will give my law and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

6. The captive Jews were treated with kindness by the king of Babylon, but they longed for the land of their fathers and for the city of Jerusalem. This longing of their hearts is beautifully expressed in one of the psalms: "Upon the rivers of Babylon, then we sat and wept, when we remembered Sion. On the willows in the midst thereof we hung up our instruments, for there they that led us into captivity re-

quired of us the words of songs. How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten. Let my tongue cleave to my jaws if I do not remember thee, if I make not Jerusalem the beginning of my joys."

7. During the captivity, God did not abandon his people but sent the prophet Ezechiel, who admonished and instructed them. He also consoled them by telling them of a vision which foreshadowed the deliverance of the people from their captivity. The spirit of the Lord brought Ezechiel to a plain filled with bones. Being told by God, he commanded the bones to come together, which was done, and they were covered with flesh and skin, but there was no spirit in them. And the Lord told Ezechiel to say to the spirit: "Come spirit, and let them live again." The spirit entered into them, and they lived; they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then the Lord said: "These bones are the house of Israel; they say that our bones are dried up and our hope is lost, but say to them: 'Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will open your graves and bring you into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord, O my people.'"

8. Amongst the captives were several young men of high rank, belonging to the first families. The king ordered the most distinguished of these to be brought to his own palace, clothed in kingly apparel, and fed with meats from his own table. Amongst these young men were Daniel, Ananias, Misael, and Azarias.

9. They resolved not to eat of the meats from the king's table, because the Jewish law forbade the use of certain meats, and they begged the chief steward to allow them to eat only vegetables, and to drink only water. The steward was disposed to comply with their request, but he told them that

if they lived on such diet they would become so lean that the king would blame him, and perhaps punish him severely.

10. Daniel besought the steward to try them for ten days with the food and drink they desired to have. The steward consented, and at the end of ten days the faces of these young men were fresher and more comely than those of the other young men of the court.

11. After this, the steward gave them only vegetables and water; but God gave them wisdom and science. When the time came that they were presented to the king, he was so charmed with their beauty and wisdom that he retained them in his service. The new covenant which Jeremias foretells is the Christian religion, in which the greater grace is given to men; for this reason it is called the law of grace, while the old testament was called the law of fear.

QUESTIONS.

1. What did the people of Juda at last become? To what did they give themselves wholly up? What more did they do? What was the result? 2. Who marched against Jerusalem, in the year 606 before Christ? What did Nabuchodonosor do when he took the city? What happened sixteen years after? 3. Where were all the people taken that escaped the sword? To what was the splendid city of Jerusalem reduced? 4. What prophet bewailed the destruction of Jerusalem? Repeat his lamentation. 5. Was Jeremias left without consolation? What did he know? How was he consoled by the Lord? How were the captive Jews treated by the king? How is the longing of their hearts expressed? Repeat the lamentation. 7. Did God abandon His people? Whom did He send to them? How did Ezechiel console them? Where did the spirit of God lead Ezechiel? What did God command him to do? Did the spirit obey him? 8. Who were amongst the captives? What did the king order with regard to these young men? Give the names of three of them? 9. What did they resolve not to do? Why? What did they beg the chief steward to give them? Why did the steward fear to grant their request? 10. What did Daniel beseech the steward to do? What happened at the end of ten days? 11. After this, what did the steward give them? What did God give them? How did the king receive them? What is the new covenant or law which the prophet Jeremias foretells?